

5.8 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Agricultural uses within the County of San Diego and the City of Carlsbad have been historically common, largely facilitated by the formation of large ranches in the early 19th century. Notable large-scale agricultural operations currently operating within the City of Carlsbad include the Carlsbad Flower Fields, located east of Interstate 5 on Palomar Airport Road, and the Carlsbad Strawberry Fields, located just off of I-5 at Cannon Road.

However, as the City of Carlsbad has continued to grow over past decades, agricultural uses have been replaced with residential and commercial uses to support the increasing population. These factors have resulted in a general increase in the value of land within the City, as well as the cost of water utilized for irrigation and labor resources required for agricultural operation. Today, as the City of Carlsbad is largely built-out and the demand for lands once utilized for agricultural purposes continues to increase in order to support the growing population, many of the City's agricultural lands continue to be sold off and converted instead to other uses.

5.8.1 Existing Conditions

5.8.1.1 Existing Activities

The proposed Ponto Area currently supports a mixture of residential, light-industrial uses, along with undeveloped land. One individual property at the northern boundary within the Ponto Area is identified as non-prime Coastal Agricultural land within the Mello II Segment of the Local Coastal Program (LCP); refer to Figure 5.7-1.

5.8.1.2 Zoning

The project site has the following zoning designations: PC – Planned Community; CT-Q – Commercial Tourist zone with Qualified Development Overlay; RD-M-Q – Residential Density – Multiple zone with Qualified Development Overlay; and, CT-Q/RD-M-Q – a dual designation indicating that with further planning, one or both uses may be appropriate. These underlying zoning designations are not intended for the preservation of agricultural lands on-site or to support continued agricultural activities, but rather support future urban land uses on the property. No change to the existing zoning is proposed with adoption of the Vision Plan.

5.8.1.3 Important Farmland Categories

The Important Farmland Mapping Categories Map is prepared by the California Resources Agency under the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which maps important farmland on agricultural lands. According to the FMMP, the project site contains land designated as Urban and Built-up Land and Other Land. No land designated as Farmland of Local Importance occurs within the 50-acre Ponto Area planned for development. The FMMP considers United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Survey information in combination with Important Farmland categorization to assess the potential for lands to be utilized as agricultural land resources.

Farmland types are defined within *A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, Appendix B: Mapping Categories and Soil Taxonomy Terms*, from the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The following are definitions of the Farmland Mapping Categories:

A. Prime Farmland

“Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for agricultural production of irrigated crops at some time during the [past four years].”

B. Farmland of Statewide Importance

“Land similar to Prime Farmland that has a good combination of physical and chemical characteristics for the production of agricultural crops. This land has minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture than Prime Farmland. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at sometime during the [past four years].”

C. Unique Farmland

“Unique Farmland is land which does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, that has been used for the production of specific high economic value crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date. It has a special combination of soil quality, location, growing season and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to current farming methods. Examples of such crops may include oranges, olives, avocados, rice, grapes, and cut flowers. It does not include publicly owned lands for which there is an adopted policy preventing agricultural use.”

D. Farmland of Local Importance

“Land that meets all the characteristics of Prime and Statewide, with the exception of irrigation. Farmlands not covered by the above categories but are of significant economic importance to the County. They have a history of good production for locally adapted crops. The soils are grouped in types that are suited for truck crops (such as tomatoes, strawberries, cucumbers, potatoes, celery, squash, romaine lettuce, and cauliflower) and soils suited for orchard crops (avocados and citrus).”

E. Other Land and Built-Up Land

Other Land and Built-Up Land are lands that do not qualify for one of the above classifications. These lands are generally disturbed or developed lands with no agricultural value or significance; refer to Figure 5.8-2 for an illustration of such lands on-site.

5.8.1.4 San Diego County Agricultural Conversion

Agricultural Soils

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Soil Survey Maps were searched for available soils within the subject site. Two soil series are located on the subject site and are described as the following:

Terrace Escarpments (TeF): This soil consists of steep to very steep escarpments and escarpment-like landscapes. The terrace escarpments occur on the nearly even fronts of terraces or alluvial fans. The escarpment-like landscapes occur between narrow flood plains and adjoining uplands and the very steep sides of drainageways that are entrenching into fairly level uplands. In most places there is 4 to 10 inches of loamy or gravelly soil over soft marine sandstone, shale, or gravelly sediments. The vegetation ranges from a sparse cover of brush and annual forbs and grasses on south-facing slopes, to a fairly dense cover on north-facing slopes. This land type occurs mainly on the coastal plain and as small areas in the foothills and the desert. It is used chiefly for watershed.

Marina loamy coarse sand, 2 to 9 percent slopes (MIC): This is an undulating to gently rolling soil on ridges. The slope is dominantly 4 percent. The elevation ranges from near sea level to 300 feet. Included with this soil in mapping are small areas of Carlsbad soils, Chesterton soils, and Corralitos soils. Fertility is medium. Permeability is rapid. The available water holding capacity is 4 to 5 inches. Runoff is slow to medium, and the erosion hazard is slight to moderate.

California Land Conservation (Williamson Act)

The Williamson Act allows for the creation of agricultural tax preserves for the protection of agricultural lands and open space. Preferential tax treatment is given to individuals in exchange for the release of development rights on such properties for purposes of land protection. Under a Williamson Act Contract (Agricultural Preserve), agricultural lands are placed under contract between the individual landowner and the local government. The property is then taxed by the City, based on its ability to generate income from agricultural production.

One Williamson Act reserve is located within the City of Carlsbad and applies to the approximately 330-acre “Flower Fields” along the east side of I-5. None of the properties included within the Ponto Area are encumbered by a Williamson Act Contract or Agricultural Preserve.

City of Carlsbad General Plan Policies

The City of Carlsbad General Plan Land Use Element provides for land use designations that allow agricultural uses; however, no land within the City is specifically designated for agricultural use or designation. The General Plan designations that apply to the subject site are intended for an urbanized area, and not for general agricultural uses.

The following General Plan goals of the Land Use Element apply to the subject site:

Goals

A.1. A City which prevents the premature elimination of agricultural land and preserves said lands wherever possible;

A.2. A City which supports agriculture while planning for possible transition to urban uses.

Although agriculture is an important resource within the City of Carlsbad, according to the Land Use Element, the City's goals are generally "intended to support agricultural activities while planning for the possible future transition of the land to more urban uses consistent with the policies of the General Plan and Local Coastal Program (LCP)." The LCP regulates the conversion of agricultural lands to urban land uses by requiring mitigation measures for the conversion of such agricultural lands. The City also offers programs that provide financial assistance to aid in the prevention of premature conversion of such lands and support the Williamson Act to reduce financial burdens on agricultural lands. City policies also include partnering with neighboring cities to preserve agricultural resources along shared boundaries and continued efforts to ensure that the Flower Fields and lands east of I-5 to the first ridgeline be preserved. However, as the City is largely built out and maintains an urban character, the City recognizes that although some agricultural lands will continue to be utilized for such purposes over the long-term, many lands that currently support agricultural crop production will likely be transitioned to other land uses over time.

5.8.2 Thresholds for Determining Significance

The significance thresholds used for this section are taken from Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. For the purpose of this EIR, a significant impact to agricultural resources would occur if the proposed project would:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) to non-agricultural use;
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract;
- Involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use; or,
- Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines also identifies the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (LESA) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland.

(A LESA model was not prepared for the project site, as no Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance [Farmland] was identified on the project site).

5.8.3 Environmental Impacts

The proposed amendments to the existing General Plan and Local Coastal Program that would be required for implementation of the Ponto Beachfront Village Vision Plan would not result in significant impacts to agricultural resources due to the conversion of Prime

Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) to non-agricultural use, as no such lands have been identified on the project site. However, one individual property at the northern boundary within the Ponto Area is identified in the Mello II Segment of the Local Coastal Program and would require compliance with agricultural conversion requirements when future development occurs (Policy 2-1). The LCP states that designated non-prime agricultural lands “shall be permitted to convert to urban uses, subject to the agricultural mitigation or feasibility provisions set forth in the LCP.” Consistent with the LCP, mitigation for the conversion of this land to non-agricultural uses would be provided in the form of a fee, to be determined by the City Council at the time it considers a coastal development permit for development. The fee would be limited to not less than \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000 per net acre of agricultural land and would be paid prior to issuance of building permit, consistent with the requirements of the LCP. As mitigation would be required under the LCP, this measure is not considered as a mitigation measure, but rather a project design consideration. Therefore, consistency with the Local Coastal Program Mello II Segment agricultural conversion requirements would reduce impacts to agricultural resources to less than significant.

A. *Zoning*

The project site has the following zoning designations: PC – Planned Community; CT-Q – Commercial Tourist zone with Qualified Development Overlay; RD-M-Q – Residential Density – Multiple zone with Qualified Development Overlay; and, CT-Q/RD-M-Q – A dual designation indicating that with further planning, one or both uses may be appropriate. No change to the existing zoning is proposed with adoption of the Vision Plan. These underlying zoning designations are not intended for the preservation of agricultural lands on-site or to support continued agricultural activities, but rather support future urban land uses on the property. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant impact as the result of a conflict with an existing zone for agricultural use.

B. *Williamson Act*

No properties within the Ponto Area are encumbered by a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, the proposed development of the Ponto Area would not result in a conflict with a Williamson Act contracted property with regards to the conversion to non-agricultural use. The project would not result in a significant impact as the result of a conflict with a Williamson Act contract.

C. *City of Carlsbad General Plan Policies*

As stated previously, the General Plan contains several goals and policies aimed at controlling the conversion of agricultural lands within the City to non-agricultural uses; however, these goals and policies are not aimed at preservation of such lands, as the City is largely urbanized in character. As no agriculturally productive land currently exists on the Ponto Area, the project would not conflict with City policies aimed at encouraging the continued operation of such uses or result in the premature conversion of such land.

D. *Conversion of Adjacent Agricultural Land*

The proposed project would not result in the conversion of adjacent agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses. The Ponto Area is located within an urban area. Surrounding lands to the north and east are largely built-out and support residential uses, while lands to the south and

west are either undevelopable (Batiquitos Lagoon) or support recreational uses (Carlsbad State Beach). Although lands within the City support limited agricultural uses (i.e. Flower Fields), these uses are located at a distance from the project site. In addition, the proposed project would be consistent with the type of development envisioned for the area, as supported by the South Carlsbad Coastal Redevelopment Area, LCP, existing zoning and General Plan land use designations, and the Ponto Beachfront Village Vision Plan. Therefore, the proposed project is not anticipated to involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use either on-site or on adjacent properties. Therefore, impacts to adjacent agricultural lands would be less than significant.

5.8.4 Mitigation Measures

No significant impacts to agricultural resources would result from the proposed project, therefore no mitigation measures are proposed.

5.8.5 Impact After Mitigation

No significant impacts to agricultural resources are anticipated as the result of the proposed project.

Figure 5.8-1
Urban Land Uses - Mello II Zones 9 and 22

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Figure 5.8-2
Important Farmland Mapping Categories

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